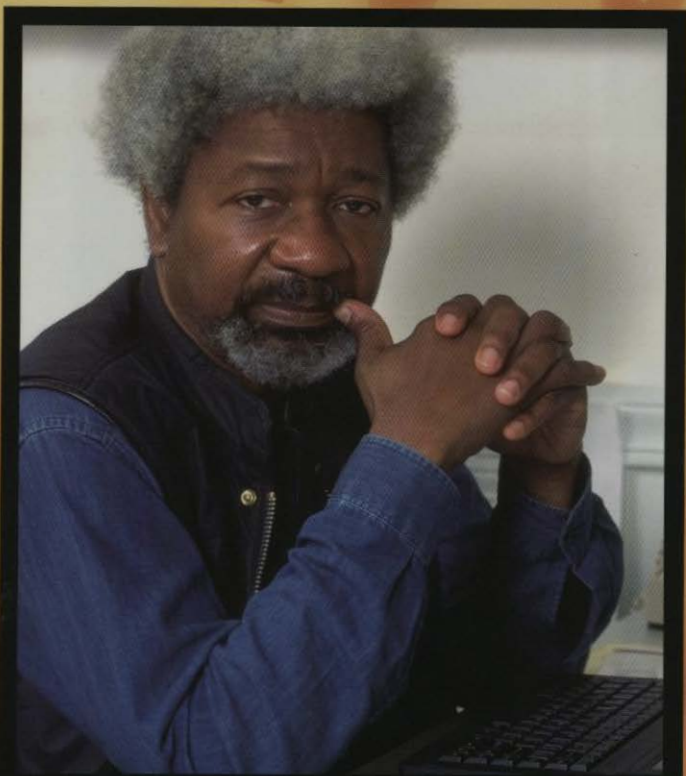


The Undergraduate's Companion to

AFRICAN WRITERS

and Their Web Sites



Miriam E. Conteh-Morgan

The Undergraduate's Companion to African Writers and Their Web Sites

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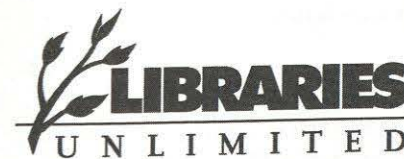
The Undergraduate's Companion to Arab Writers and Their Web Sites

Dona S. Straley

Miriam E. Conteh-Morgan

Undergraduate Companion Series

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*To my departed parents, KJM and AJM,
for the legacy of memories.*

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Introduction

The need for the study of Africa in institutions of higher learning in the United States came in the wake of some parallel and interconnected developments of the 1960s. These include the Black Consciousness Movement in the US that led to the creation of Black Studies departments and courses about the black world, and the decolonization of Africa, which spawned new alliances among nations and altered the dynamics of Cold War politics.

This period was also marked by an increase in the publication of literary texts by Africans, and consequently by a growing body of critical literature devoted to it. Today, with four Nobel prizewinners—Wole Soyinka, Naguib Mahfouz, Nadine Gordimer, and J. M. Coetzee—African literature has not only gained high global recognition, but it has become a firmly established part of non-Western or world literature course offerings in many general education curricula across the United States.

No longer exclusively housed within Black/Africana studies programs, African writers are now read in English, French, Portuguese, women's studies, and comparative studies departments, for example, making African literature a broader part of the undergraduate experience.

Many undergraduates typically come to these courses with little or no prior exposure to African writers, and, therefore, with no experience doing research on them. Numerous introductions to the literature and works of criticism on specific writers are available in most academic libraries. There are also bibliographies and reference resources such as *African Authors*, by Donald Herdeck (Washington DC: INSCAPE, 1974), and Bernth Lindfors's cumulative series, *Black African Literature in English* (1987, 1995, and 2000). Others include Virginia Coulon's *Bibliographie francophone de littérature africaine* (1994), *The Companion to African Literatures*, by Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe (Bloomington, IN:

Indiana University Press, 1999), Pushpa Parekh and Siga Jagne's *Postcolonial African Writers* (Greenwood Press, 1998), and the more recent *Encyclopedia of African Literature* (Routledge, 2003), edited by Simon Gikandi. Like many literary reference works, however, they do not include Web resources.

Given that Web sites have been cited in many studies as the primary and preferred reference source for today's undergraduates, *The Undergraduate's Companion to African Writers and Their Web Sites*, like other companions in the series, seeks to meet a need for literary reference works that would steer students toward useful information on the Web. Conceived and compiled with undergraduates' research needs and tool preferences in mind, this book brings together carefully selected Web and print resources deemed useful for researching specific African writers.

Featured Writers and Their Works

The writers featured in this companion were selected based on two criteria: that there is material on them in an easily available reference work, and that there is some information of research value on free Web sites. Fee-based online databases are excluded because of the disparities in access that may exist among academic libraries. The research materials that I consider of value include biographies, bibliographies of primary and secondary works, excerpts from, or electronic full text of, writers' works, critical essays, and interviews (including audio and video clips of them).

Writers who meet only one or neither of these two criteria are not included. For example, for known writers like James Ene Henshaw (Nigeria) and Fatima Dike (South Africa), I found no research Web site; and the more contemporary Ingrid de Kok and Karen Press (South Africa) have a significant Web presence, but they do not seem to have yet made it into the reference books I consulted. In the end, the book contains entries on just over 300 writers from thirty-nine countries. About a quarter are women, and each of their names is marked with an asterisk in the country list of writers.

I also had to determine a working definition of the terms "Africa" and "African writer." Instead of going by the familiar division of the continent into sub-Saharan and North (or Maghrebian) Africa, I adopt a whole-continent approach, to also include the Indian Ocean islands. I include major writers from North Africa, who either write in French, or whose original Arabic works are available in English. Students will therefore find in this companion entries on writers from Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt, from the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and the Comoros, and from sub-Saharan countries such as Djibouti (east), Sierra Leone (west), and Zimbabwe (south). The rationale for being all-inclusive rests mainly on the view that many survey courses on African literature try to be representative, and they typically feature writers from around the continent.

On the question of defining an African writer, I follow established practice. The most common characteristic is being African-born, regardless of country of

later residence. In this category would be a writer like Ben Okri, born in Nigeria, now living in Britain, and who is also classified as a British writer. I also include in this category Albert Camus, who was born and raised in Algeria, though he is best known as a French writer. Another reference work, *African Writers* (Charles Scribener's, 1997), has an entry on him. Authors such as Doris Lessing, who moved to South Africa with her British parents at an early age (she is also part of British literary tradition), or British-born Kenyan-transplant, Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, have also been considered African, and both are listed in this book as such.

For other writers, though, the description of African writer may be debated because neither the country of birth nor the residence criterion holds true for them. For example, Azouz Begag and Marie Ndiaye were both born in France to African immigrant parents; they continue to live there, but they are identified as African writers because of their heritage. Clearly, classifications are not always neat or easy, and that is why some writers straddle two literary traditions. For such African writers, I have included in this book references from both traditions.

Another central issue in African literature is language. There is no single one that characterizes the literature because the works are written in a variety of languages. The majority of modern African writers use one of three European languages of colonization—English, French, or Portuguese—giving rise to descriptions for such writing and writers as "anglophone," "francophone," and "lusophone" respectively. Others write in African languages such as Gikuyu, Swahili, Afrikaans, Hausa, Amharic, or Zulu. Although the references cited in the book are predominantly in English, they describe writers who use a wide variety of languages.

All the authors in this book belong to the late 19th century and the 20th-century. One notable exception is Olaudah Equiano, an eighteenth-century African, whose slave narrative is sometimes considered the first work of African literature. Their writing covers all the genres, with some creating works across different genres and forms. Examples include Flora Nwapa and Chinua Achebe, who write novels and children's stories; Ousmane Sembène who is a writer and filmmaker; and Francis Bebey, a writer and musician. Realizing that undergraduates will gain a more complete picture of writers' creativity, and that these authors can be researched under each of these genres and modes of expression, I have tried where possible to include reference sources for each of the categories.

Selecting Web Sites

It is a cliché to say that the World Wide Web throws too much information at a searcher, both good and useless. In the process of whittling down the hits to reliable and research-worthy ones, I have eliminated those whose pages have too many distractions, especially when the information they contain is found elsewhere, and with some value-added features.

Most of the sites I selected fall into one of four categories. First, there are Web projects created by members of academic institutions. These tend to be stable, and they feature multiple writers; most importantly they are designed specifically either for students as complements to African literature courses, or as instructor-supervised student projects. One is more likely to find bibliographies of critical works, in addition to the usual biographies and lists of writers' works on such sites.

I also relied on Web projects hosted by cultural and research institutions, major newspapers, and professional organizations. Examples of the former include the Africa Centre and the British Council, both in the United Kingdom. The newspapers I cite include the *New York Times*, *The Guardian* (UK), and *The Mail and Guardian* (South Africa), and they typically provide book reviews, interviews with writers, and obituaries.

A third category of Web site selected is the kind embedded within country or region projects. Some such as The KwaZulu-Natal Literary Map are sponsored by government agencies, and others are hosted by commercial Internet service providers. Such projects are intended to showcase a country or region's diverse assets, including the literary. Then there are projects developed by literature enthusiasts. They are most often dedicated to single authors or to authors who write a certain kind of literature. Although the sites tend to be of unequal value, the ones deemed good enough to be included normally have brief biographies and links to other Web sources on a writer.

Not all the sites are researcher friendly. A number of them do not rigorously conform to Web editing protocols. On some sites, for example, it is impossible to identify their creators, and they contain neither revision dates nor clear statements of objective. In other instances, sites may provide the full text of poems and short stories without always citing their source materials. However, I do not consider some of these contraventions major enough to warrant rejecting the site, especially when the information a site contains withstands some basic reliability tests. Where they occur, the shortcomings are acknowledged in my citations (as in "update unavailable") or in annotations.

Another point worth mentioning is that the sites in the book are not always in English, given the linguistic diversity of the literature noted earlier. If there are two language versions of the site, I systematically choose the English language one. But when a site is in French, or, in a few cases, in Portuguese, I still include it because some upper-level students would have a high enough language proficiency to understand the information provided.

Generally every Web site has a full bibliographic citation, with an indication of the date I last visited it, the URL, and a descriptive annotation. An exception is made for sites with multiple author pages. In such cases where the main projects are referred to many times throughout the book, and each author page follows the same template, the complete citation is not repeated, nor is an annotation given. Instead, the "Frequently Cited Web Sites" section of this book provides the full bibliographic details and site description.

Print Sources

The references cited in the non-Web categories are all taken from the many print sources I personally consulted. The majority of these books are standard reference material found in many academic libraries, so most undergraduates should have access to them. Among these are the multi-volume Gale series: *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, and *Black Literature Criticism*. Many of the literary criticism works repackage the same information in the different series, so I selected only those that provide a chronological flow without much overlap. Other reference works on African literature, postcolonial literature, and world writers were also used.

For selections from multivolume sets with various editors, I provide only the name of the editors of the specific volume, the series titles, and volume numbers. Where multiple entries are drawn from one volume, I give partial bibliographic information, just as in the case of Web projects with multiple author pages. The full citations for all these books appear in the "Frequently Cited References" section.

In a few instances I have used book chapters and journal articles to flesh out bio-critical entries and interviews. This occurred when I could find no substantial entry in the reference books I consulted, but I felt the writer had to be included in the book.

Organization of Entries

The writers are listed in alphabetical order. Each entry is headed by the writer's full name, including variant forms and pseudonyms, and the date of birth, and death, where applicable. The canonical reference books, and sometimes obituaries in newspapers, have served as the authorities for these biographical details.

Pre-eminence is given to Web sites, so that is the category listed first after each writer's name. This section is not broken down by content type, unlike the print resources, which are subdivided into biographies and criticism, and any of the following where they apply: dictionaries, encyclopedias and handbooks, bibliographies, and interviews.

The entries follow MLA citation style.

Using the Companion

This book is meant to serve as a resource for introductory material on African writers, so it is by no means an exhaustive guide to the literature. The references provided should serve well in cases where what the undergraduate student needs is material for a short research paper. In cases where more extensive research is called for, I highly recommend working with reference and African Studies librarians for more in-depth searches in journal databases and online catalogs for critical articles and books. This book will also be a useful guide for the casual reader of African literature with a need for information on writers.

Alphabetical List of Authors

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Abrahams, Lionel, 1928–2004
Abrahams, Peter, 1919–
Achebe, Chinua, 1930–
Acholonu, Catherine, 1951–
Adedeji, Remi, 1937–
Adiaffi, Anne-Marie, 1951–1995
Agualusa, José, 1960–
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Aidoo, Ama Ata, 1942–
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Aluko, T. M., 1918–
Amadi, Elechi, 1934–
Amrouche, Jean, 1907–1962
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Angira, Jared, 1947–
Anyidoho, Kofi, 1947–
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Asare, Meshack, 1945–
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Beyala, Calixthe, 1961–
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Blixen, Karen, 1885–1962
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- Campbell, Roy, 1901–1957
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 Cronin, Jeremy, 1949–
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 Kane, Cheikh Hamidou, 1928–
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